

University of Windsor Scholarship at UWindsor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

1995

Gibberish: A digital hiding place for pomo sapiens.

Marcel Mervin Gerard. O'Gorman
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

O'Gorman, Marcel Mervin Gerard., "Gibberish: A digital hiding place for pomo sapiens." (1995). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 2231.

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file - Votre référence

Cher file - Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

GIBBERISH: A DIGITAL HIDING PLACE FOR POMO SAPIENS

by

Marcel M.G. O'Gorman

Hard Copy Edition of
A Digital Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1995

© 1995 Marcel O'Gorman



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Votre bibliothèque *Votre référence*

Votre bibliothèque *Votre référence*

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-10951-8

Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
PREFATORY NOTE	iv
"What is Gibberish?"	1
WORKS CITED	15
Hard Copy Sampling of "Gibberish: a digital hiding place for pomo sapiens"	16

DEDICATION

This text and its digital parent are dedicated to Beth Marinacci whose unbounded generosity and creative energy provided much of the electricity necessary to run the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Naturally, I owe a great debt to Steven Gibb, the artist who so willingly offered his paintings as libations for digital experimentation. Of course, this project would have been impossible without the generosity, and most of all, the trust of my wise supervisor, Eugene McNamara. I would also like to thank the Department of English for providing me with the computer hardware and creative freedom necessary to accomplish a goal that was at best sketchy at the onset.

I have not neglected to remember the people whose technical expertise kept my digital and cerebral wiring from short-circuiting. Professors Steven Karamatos and William Law at the University of Windsor were literally on call for the duration of the project, generously providing technical advice as well as the addresses of some of the most bizarre home pages on the WWW. Among the ranks of the technical geniuses who made the project possible is Kevin O'Connor, a man who had the ability to transform my ethereal thoughts into virtual reality.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Beth, my parents, Bernard and Joyce, and to all those who patiently endured my obsessive, passionate affair with a gray box and flashing video monitor. Thank you for having faith in me.

PREFATORY NOTE

This text is composed of two main parts: an essay entitled, "What is Gibberish" and a selection of critical/graphical materials under the title of "Gibberish: a digital hiding place for pomo sapiens." "Gibberish" is a project created in and for the digital environment. It first appeared in hypertext on the World Wide Web in May, 1995 at the following address:

<http://www.cs.uwindsor.ca/units/english/gibb/gibcover.htm>.

The portion of "Gibberish" that is included in this text has been printed directly from the WWW, and it is merely a sampling of the hypertext edition of the project.

Notably, hypertext cannot be adequately translated into printed material. This is why "Gibberish" does not conform to the standards of print required by the Department of Graduate Studies. The margins and fonts have been reproduced exactly as they appear in the hypertext version. Most importantly, the violet-coloured words in "Gibberish" are link words, or *hotlinks*. In the hypertext version, a reader may click on these words in order to visit other texts, or *lexias*. "Gibberish" is thus intended to be an interactive project, and therefore, it cannot be fully appreciated in its hard copy edition.

WHAT IS GIBBERISH?

*Everywhere the virus of potentialization and
mise en abyme carries the day; carries us towards
an ecstasy which is also that of indifference.*

-Jean Baudrillard

gib-ber-ish (jib'pr ish, gib'-) n., meaningless or unintelligible talk or writing; nonsense.

2. talk or writing containing many obscure, pretentious, or technical words.

The above definition is what the digital *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* tells us about gibberish. But for those who have witnessed the hypertextual experiment of Steven Gibb and myself, gibberish may represent something completely different -- especially if the word is pronounced with a hard "g." We might say that, if nothing else, the project rendered the meaning of "gibberish" a little more unstable.

In fact, the destabilization of meanings, the destabilization of the signifier, is at the very heart of Gibberish. I mentioned in one of my many prospectuses for Gibberish that the project would involve a form of mythologising -- that is, mythologising in the Barthesian sense. According to Roland Barthes,

myth is a type of speech, [and] everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits of myth, there are no 'substantial' ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes... (Barthes, 1972: 109)

Not even postmodern theory itself is safe from the destabilizing practice of mythology. And as we have seen, even the extremely cryptic and seemingly esoteric paintings of Gibb can serve as containers for such a mythology.

draw-er (drô'pr)., a person or thing that draws

Gibberish, then, is a mythical discourse in which the paintings of Gibb are used as springboards into postmodern theory. Gibb paints an airplane crashing and a man with a screen for a head, and I translate it into a treatise on terminal culture and *fin de millennium* paranoia. Gibb paints a man in a gelatinous cube, and I write about digital melancholia and the nostalgic longing for a truth and objectivity which have been lost. In short, it doesn't matter what Gibb intended when he painted his works--if indeed he did intend anything at all--what matters is that the paintings act as starting points for a discourse about the postmodern scene. The paintings act as places where postmodern theory can be discussed. The paintings are, in effect, like boxes or drawers--receptacles into which I place meaning, and out of which I draw a discourse. Almost like drawing a rabbit from a hat.

draw (drô) v., to bring, take, or pull out, as from a receptacle or source: to draw water from a well; to draw blood from a vein.

And so, you can see why Gibb's painting, *Six Great Thoughts of the Twentieth Century* -- also known as *Drawer Man* -- may be considered as the guiding image, the leitmotif of this project. In my "Freudian Pomospectus," I advise the reader to "consider Gibb's head as a dresser of drawers storing an image repertoire from which he draws freely while dressing his naked sheets of plywood and masonite." In effect the prevalent tendency of the postmodern is to view all of history as an image repertoire from which artists can draw shamelessly and as often as they please. All of art, all of history is on call -- stockpiled, in the most technological sense. We can thus view rap music as a

postmodern phenomenon. Rap musicians tend to view all of musical history as a smorgasbord where music is stockpiled, left on reserve, to be reappropriated within new contexts. And the home computer itself is the ultimate symbol of postmodern availability. The computer is a tool for the stockpiling of information. It acts as a memory-machine where information is on call, on reserve. In many ways, a computer is like a dresser of drawers--this is why *Drawer-Man* was the first painting to draw my eye, once the idea for the project got rolling.

Looking back, I can say that Gibberish is first of all, the attempt to create a new type of theoretical discourse by drawing on Gibb's image repertoire, as well as the repertoire of postmodern theory. In this sense, then, the project was motivated by the desire for an invention. This is why, at the onset of the project I could not provide a real prospectus for Gibberish. I didn't know what the final result would be. I didn't know what exactly would be invented, or discovered until the project drew towards an end.

This type of haphazard approach towards the invention of a new discourse is not original. Perhaps Greg Ulmer's *Heuretics* is the finest contemporary example of an attempt to create an original form of discourse based on the logic of catastrophe, the logic of *Eureka!*, the logic of *Heuretics*.

The modest proposal [of *Heuretics*, writes Ulmer] is: to invent an electronic academic writing the way Breton invented surrealism, or the way Plato invented dialectics: to do with "Jacques Derrida" . . . what Breton did with Freud (or--why not?--what Plato did with Socrates).
(Ulmer, 1994: 15)

We could say that the proposal for Gibberish, then is to do with Jean Baudrillard what

Breton did with Freud.

This type of Ulmerian project requires two things: first, it requires a carefully-chosen literary repertoire--Breton chose Freud, Ulmer chose Derrida, I chose Jean Baudrillard and other French postmodernists; and second, such a project requires a place where it can unfold and develop. Ulmer draws on Derrida's notion of *Chora* in order to explain this concept of a place of unfolding. According to Derrida, "*Chora* 'means': place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory or region. And in fact, *chora* will always be occupied, invested" (Derrida, 1987: 289). *Chora*, Ulmer notes,

is not the object of a tale but the seat, the place of reception and unfolding in which each tale is a receptacle, a place of inscription, for another. (150)

Ulmer found that *Chora* can be exploited as a means of invention, that is, if you take a tale that has already been told, and you occupy its narrative space in a most parasitic way. You retell the original tale, but with the intention of creating a totally new story. This is what Breton did with Freud in order to produce the *Surrealist Manifesto*. Breton actually inhabited psychoanalysis in order to create Surrealism. And in *Heuretics*, Ulmer takes over the 1939 Paramount Pictures film, *Beau Geste*, and in fact, he actually invades Fort Zinderneuf, armed with the grammatological discourse of Jacques Derrida.

Interestingly, the whole project of *Heuretics* is driven forward by the means of puns. For example, Ulmer takes the German expression, *fort/da* -- a sort of peek-a-hoo game that Freud played as a child--and turns it into the core of his discourse, Jacques

Derrida inside Fort Zinderneuf. So the pun kind of takes the place of logical reasoning in a Heuretic discourse. And the opportunity to create a pun is considered as the basis for the creation of a new concept, or puncept.

The following demonstrates the unfolding of a puncept as it occurred in the making of Gibberish: I chose the title of *The Screan*, for one of Gibb's works (a painting of a man with a screen for a head) because it reminded me of Edward Munch's *The Scream*. Only later did I remember that Frederic Jameson relies quite heavily upon Munch's painting in the book, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. So this simple pun involving "scream" and "screan" allowed me to generate a critique of Gibb's painting based on Jameson's observation of the paranoia and alienation in a terminal culture -- terminal culture being another pun which we can associate with this painting.

So, in Heuretics the idea is to look at a story, an image or a even a film as a receptacle into which you place an object. But since the receptacle already contains an object, something has to spill out. What spills out is the invention.

In the case of Gibberish, I chose, not a tale as the seat of reception, but an image, or a series of images. I looked at Gibb's paintings as receptacles, and I occupied them in a most parasitic way. I didn't alter the physical appearance of the paintings in order to suit my needs--except for the fact that I digitized them--I simply forced the paintings to share space with a discourse: the discourse of postmodern theory.

draw (drô) v., something that is chosen or drawn at random, as a lot or chance.

So you can see how the element of chance is germane to this project. In alchemical terms I repeatedly forced a collision between two elements in order to produce an effect, a reaction, an invention. There is an inherently explosive, or volcanic property in the method that I followed. For me, the explosion marks the moment of invention, the moment of *Eureka!*, the moment when I got that feeling that, "yes, something has happened here -- I've created something." My blind reliance upon intuition was of the utmost importance in this project.

The question that remains is, "what was the result of my experiment?" Now that the smoke from the explosions has cleared somewhat. What is Gibberish? Under the "What Gibb's?" heading of Gibberish, which may be accessed from a button on the home page, I suggest that Gibberish is a "graphic language of the postmodern." In other words, Gibberish turned out to be a sort of illustrated encyclopedia of the postmodern. *The Screan*, for example, is a graphic representation, or definition of terminal culture and *fin de millennium* paranoia as Jameson or Baudrillard might describe it. *Fer à Repasser* is a lesson in Foucauldian textual theory -- a theory which views irony as the prevalent tendency of avant-garde art. *No Parole* and *The Wrench* chart the movement of culture from the high-industrial scene as described by Marx, to a post-industrial, Heideggerian scene. These concepts are rendered even more accessible for the reader by the fact that they are set within the framework Windsor culture -- strip clubs, coffee shops, factories, the casino, the salt mines.

So one can take lessons on postmodernism by browsing through Gibberish. And the paintings even act as built-in mnemonic devices that you can take with you when you

exit. After viewing the project, the images may leave an impression on your mind. The image of Gibb's iron may help you to remember Foucault's look at textuality. Gibb's man with a terminal-head may help you recall Baudrillard's description of terminal culture.

But Gibberish goes beyond its role of illustrated encyclopedia. Certainly, Gibberish is a form of digital reference tool which takes the gibberish of postmodernism and renders it more accessible. However, in making these matters more accessible -- by treating postmodern concepts as things which occur naturally, even in the city of Windsor -- Gibberish is fulfilling another agenda -- an agenda of which I did not quite conceive until the end of the project drew near. Gibberish has turned out to be a manifesto against postmodern theory.

draw (drô) v., to disembowel: to draw a turkey.

I have already suggested that Gibberish is a mythologisation project. But what is being mythologised here? Am I mythologising certain aspects of Windsor culture? Am I mythologising Gibb's paintings? How do we uncover the object of mythology in Gibberish? Perhaps it would be prudent to ask Roland Barthes to solve this mythery.

According to Barthes,

the mythologised object is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social *usage* which is added to pure matter. (109)

In essence, that which is decorated in Gibberish, that which is adapted to a certain type of social usage is postmodern theory itself. Gibberish is a mythologisation of the

"technical, pretentious and obscure" discourse of the postmodern.

In order to better understand the ultimate role of mythologisation, it would be helpful to review the mechanics mythology. As I have already indicated, the goal of the mythologist is to show the instability of the signifier. By causing something to appear extremely natural, we paradoxically underscore the fact that it is constructed. Mythology may thus be defined a critical tool of the postmodern. As Linda Hutcheon points out,

the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees.
(Hutcheon, 1989: 2)

Gibberish treats postmodern theory as something natural, not constructed, something that can be observed in Gibb's paintings and in the very architecture of the city of Windsor. The Art Gallery relocation becomes a fine example of the commodification of art on the postmodern scene; the Windsor coffee shops allow us to witness first hand, the disappearance of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction; the salt mine beneath the city is itself, a *mise en abyme* of postmodern existence -- an existence in which God is Dead, we no longer worry about the sky falling; but we worry about the ground shaking beneath our feet. We worry about the instability of our foundations.

As a symptom of this paranoia, we also worry about the instability of our signifiers. Gibberish demonstrates that theories of the postmodern are susceptible to the very instability upon which they are based. There is a certain ironic facade of truth, a certain self-righteousness even, that postmodern theory enjoys. Even Derrida has

become a legend, an author with a capital A. His books are read as works, with a capital W. All told, Gibberish has become an attempt to rob postmodern theory of its aura, to rob it of its unique history, to commodify it, to hand it over to the realm of kitsch.

Even the poststructural practice of mythology is mythologised in this project, since Roland Barthes is swallowed up in the kitschy, meandering network of Gibberish. Barthes himself noted that "truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is to mythify it in its turn and to produce an artificial myth" (135). Gibberish does produce the artificial myth. Gibberish deconstructs deconstruction. Hence, Gibberish is at once deconstructive and anti-deconstructive, postmodern and post-postmodern. Gibberish is the ultimate in critical nihilism. It is anti-traditional, its tradition being rooted postmodern theory. It is also anti-historical:

myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things, in it, things lose the memory that they once made. . . . A conjuring trick has taken place; [myth] has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence. (142)

So Gibberish -- and I had previously been warned of this by one of my mentors at the University of Ottawa -- is a device which serves to evaporate history. A tool for the disintegration of the aura. A tool for the destabilization of meaning.

draw (drô) v., to take out a sword, pistol, etc., for action.

So where does this leave us? Admittedly, the result of the project sounds rather

grim. But there is an element of Gibberish that I have thus far neglected. That is, the technical, the computer-based, the hypertextual element of the project. And it is in the area of hypermedia that we can draw some important lessons from Gibberish.

There are several techniques of destabilization in Gibberish -- the use of puns, for example which overtly thwarts the linkage of signifier / signified; the reliance upon intertextuality and decontextualization, which denies the authority of a work of art; and the mingling of popular discourse with the discourse of high postmodern theory, which is a decentering strategy, a practice which leads to a disintegration of canon, a disintegration of history and of tradition. All of these are part of the anti-historical, destabilization arsenal of Gibberish. But what's more interesting, is that all of these techniques are inherent in the very technology used to display Gibberish.

In a book simply entitled "Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literary Studies" George Landow & Paul Delaney note that there are several

theoretical implications of hypertext which converge with some major points of contemporary literary and semiological theory, particularly with Derrida's emphasis on decentering, with Barthes's conception of the readerly versus the writerly text, with postmodernism's rejection of sequential narratives and unitary perspectives, and with the issue of "intertextuality". In fact, [Landow continues,] hypertext creates an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment of such concepts.

(Landow & Delaney, 1992: 6)

Hypertext, which is defined by its capacity to link up various documents, or to link up various units of information, charts an inevitable course to the destabilization of language and the dissolution of history.

First of all, a link word itself is like a pun. Certainly, like a word in any written

document, a link word fulfils its role as a unit of meaning in a sentence. But because the word is hotlinked in blue or violet, we are reminded that it may have a completely different meaning elsewhere. These blue or violet-coloured words disturb our linear reading process, and force us to recognize the instability of meaning. We see the word here, but it is present elsewhere. We cannot assign a single meaning to the word because we know that it exists elsewhere in the hypertext, only a split-second away, and in a context where it may be charged with a totally different range of associations.

draw (drô) v., to bring toward oneself or itself, as by inherent force; attract: The sale drew large crowds.

In fact, a hotlinked word beckons us, seduces us into clicking on it, seduces us into destabilizing the text. The most prevalent comment made by readers of Gibberish is that they have trouble following any individual text (lexia, node) from top to bottom. Their linear reading process was constantly interrupted. They were constantly being seduced by the potentiality which links create.

The ability to create and follow links in hypertext dissolves the opposition of signifier and signified right before our very eyes. Hypertext, then, is a radical embodiment of the conceptual cornerstone of poststructural semiology, of deconstruction and of the postmodern in general.

As we have already noted, hypertext also embodies the notion of intertextuality, and it renders visible the death of the author in a painfully explicit manner. In fact, hypertext allows for the creation of a whole intertextual network right on the screen, not

excluding intertextual references to paintings and other graphic images, even moving images. And if we feed this intertextual network over the internet where it can be appropriated by any Net user, the various texts will be continuously recontextualized, continuously de-historicized. **We are then witnessing deconstruction on a global scale.**

I chose hypertext as a medium for Gibberish, because I figured, what better way to present a project on the postmodern? What better vehicle than a medium with built-in postmodern concepts? I also chose hypertext because, as I discovered in other hypermedia projects, the digital medium allows me to unfold a form of discourse which I could never present on paper--a discourse which better suits the manner in which I think. As the proponents of hypertext have indicated time and time again, the mind, unlike the book, is not linear or sequential -- the mind is not composed of numbered pages. As trite as this may sound, it is true that the mind works by means of non-linear association, and hypertext supports and encourages associational thinking. Hypertext is the ideal medium in which to create a new discourse because it allows us to better express and develop the type of associational thinking required for invention.

What I didn't initially realize about the medium which I chose for Gibberish, is that hypertext is the perfect container for communicating a manifesto against postmodern theory such as Gibberish. Both hypertext and Gibberish, I discovered, are tools of commodification, tools which disintegrate aura's, tools which dissolve history. Most importantly, they are both tools which render visible postmodern concepts -- tools which cause the postmodern to appear obscenely natural. By rendering the postmodern visible

and even obscene, hypertext threatens to rob postmodern theory of its history, to rob the postmodern of its aura. Postmodern theory is now replaced by the most simple mechanical operations of a desk-top computer.

The question that remains is, what happens when even the most abstract theories - theories which render everything insignificant -- are themselves transformed into something insignificant, are themselves reduced to the level of mechanical operation?

draw (drô) v., to bend (a bow) by pulling back the string in preparation for shooting an arrow.

Are we on the verge of a cyborgian culture, as Baudrillard suggests? A culture in which not only the theories of human beings, but the human beings themselves are mechanized, are transformed into beings of half-flesh & half-electronic circuitry? A culture in which human beings are isolated, alienated within the celluloid closets of their computer terminals?

Or are we on the verge of a new humanism? A culture in which the human being breaks through the walls of its celluloid closet and enlightens the entire world with its brilliance?

I leave these questions to the writers of science fiction.

Whatever the case, I believe that Gibberish demonstrates that in the very midst of dissolution and destabilization a new order can emerge. Catastrophe can and must always be viewed as an opportunity for invention, as an opportunity for improvement. My only hope is that we are on the verge of a new form of cultural theory, a new theory of art created for, and inspired by the digital medium. A theory and practice of writing

which is both playful and profound, and which draws on the potential of digital intelligence in order to investigate and fulfil the potentials of the human intellect.

Perhaps Gibberish hasn't accomplished all of this. Perhaps it will lose its hard G over time, and those who come wander into Steven's drawers on the World Wide Web will only view it as gibberish. But I believe that this project may at least point in the direction of a new artistic and intellectual movement. Gibberish stands on the forefront of digital literacy, unselfishly offering itself as an example of how writing may be approached in the new medium and in the culture of the *fin de millennium*.

draw (drô) v., draw the curtain on or over. a. to bring to a close: to draw the curtain on a long career. b. to keep secret.

WORKS CITED

- Barthes, Roland (1972) "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday.
- Hutcheon, Linda (1989) *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: New Accents.
- Landow, George P. and Paul Delaney, eds. (1991) *Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Ulmer, Gregory *Heuretics: the Logic of Invention* (1994) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

:

A collage of 15 black and white photographs. The top row includes a cup of coffee, a person in a hat, a person in a suit, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform. The bottom row includes a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform, a person in a military uniform.

- ❑ WHAT GIBBS?
- ❑ WHAT'S ON THE MENEW?
- ❑ WHAT'S COOLER THAN *COOL MEMORIES*?
- ❑ GLOSSARY



Six Great Thoughts of the Twentieth Century



Consider Stephen Gibb's Drawer Man in the painting, "Six Great Thoughts of the Twentieth Century". His head is a virtual repository of the pivotal art movements of the last century. In one drawer, Dali's melting watch counts the liquid time of subjective experience. Above, the stick figures of Jackson Pollock threaten to hurl themselves over the edge of their cramped, geometrical compartment. On the left, a cubist Picasso-head, scorning its two-dimensional space, peers lopsidedly at the viewer from beneath Duchamp's precariously positioned urinal--a gaping orifice which laughs sardonically at all art enthusiasts. Finally, in the centre of the furrowed forehead, Warhol's Campbells can--a fetishistic reminder of the undaunted and arbitrary shifting of signs on the art landscape--stands proud and erect, almost tauntingly.

Here, Warhol's can is merely another commodified ingredient in the soup. Or is this a stew? A hearty and delicious mélange of creative genius? A hurly-burly hodgepodge springing, like Venus or Sin, from the weary and prematurely-aged head of Gibb? Consider Gibb's head then, as a dresser of drawers storing an image repertoire from which he draws freely while clothing his naked sheets of plywood and masonite.

Still, there is a problem with Gibb's head. There is a drawer unopened. A heavy, indolent, obstinate drawer that can't be coaxed. This is the sixth drawer -- this is Gibb's mouth.



Opening Gibb's Mouth: a Freudian pomospectus

My mission is that of the curious child playing in the wardrobe - a familiar paradigm. But I shall play the role of the disordered child, of the child driven beyond curiosity by a desire for excess, by the neurotic compulsion to play holes. My task is to pry Gibb's stubborn mouth/drawer open just a crack, and stuff it with photographs, paintings, anecdotes, postmodern theory, novels, manifestoes, maps. When the drawer bursts open and ejaculates the Pandorian concoction, we shall have a mythology, a discourse to clothe or overclothe whatever happens to pop out of Stephen's drawers and splatter onto his plywood.

A conventional academic prospectus for such a mission would be tyrannical, and perhaps even dangerous, as it would only serve to intensify the project's eventual and imminent explosion. A prospectus would merely be another letter to break, another building to tear down, another layer of iron to be shredded in a violent dissemination of shrapnell. But if a teleology we must have, then I offer as surrogate the words of Sigmund Freud, an apt spokesman for disordered children:

"It is an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity, to see where it will lead".

Let these words act as my prospectus -- the kleptomaniacal prospectus of an uninhibited, selfish child. When at last the master arrives, and catches me red-handed, then I shall cease my dysfunctional activity, and leave the mess for him to disentangle. Then, and only then, shall we have our complete and orderly prospectus, though it may take the form of an epispectus, or shall I say, respectus.

[illegible]

Duchamp's Urinal

Instead of being subsumed in a transcendent ideality, art has been dissolved within a general aestheticization of everyday life, giving way to a pure circulation of images, a transaesthetics of banality. . . . The crucial moment for art was undoubtedly that of Dada and Duchamp, that moment when art, by renouncing its own aesthetic rules of the game, debouched into the transaesthetic era of the banality of the image.

(Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*)



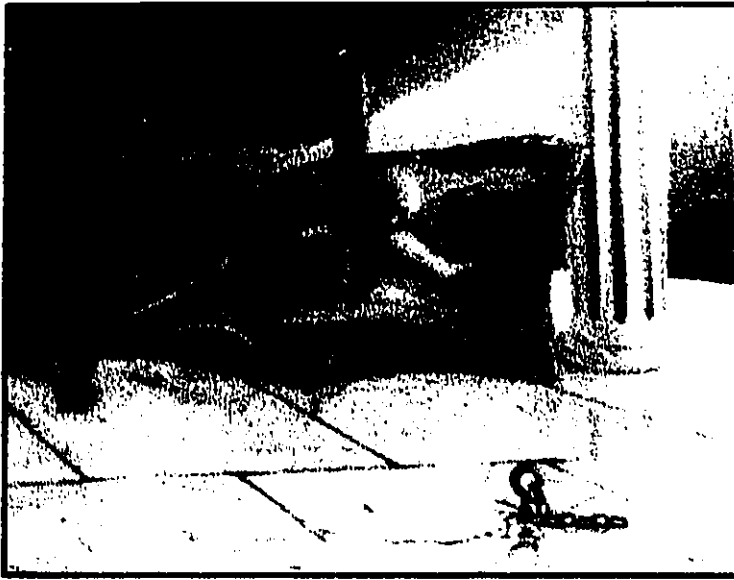
Warhol's Can

Andy Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification, and the great billboard images of the Coca-Cola bottle or the Campbell's soup can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital, *ought* to be powerful and critical political statements. If they are not that, then one would surely want to know why, and one would want to begin to wonder a little more seriously about the possibilities of political or critical art in the postmodern period of late capital.

(Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*)



Gelancholia I



After finally breaking the chains of reason and objectivity, the subject in this painting finds himself constrained in the gelatinous cube of his own subjectivity. The chains are broken, and yet the subject is not free, he is crushed by the realisation of his own contingent nature, his own absurdity. "The slave in chains is free to break them," Sartre said; but once the chains are broken, the slave who stares into the void of the infinite is paralysed like a deer in headlights, spiritually mired like a man in a gelatinous cube. He can no longer draw a protective horizon around himself, for there is no more faith, no more hope, no rules to live by, no means of organizing experience.

Gelatinous-cube Man foolishly believed that once his chains were broken, he, Samson-like, could break the pillars of the house of reason. Instead, his freedom brings only weakness, and he finds himself burdened with his own subjectivity. He longs nostalgically for the legendary and illusive turusphere, symbol of reason and truth. But it is too late. The Newtonian turusphere, like all other ideal forms, has been demystified. There are no heroes in a utopia ruled by the law of subjectivity. Yet still, the melancholic Gelatinous-cube Men will attempt in vain to shed their hard-earned capsules of selfhood. They will always reach backwards hopelessly towards demystified objects of desire -- objects which can only be resurrected as simulacra.



■ Gelancholia II ■

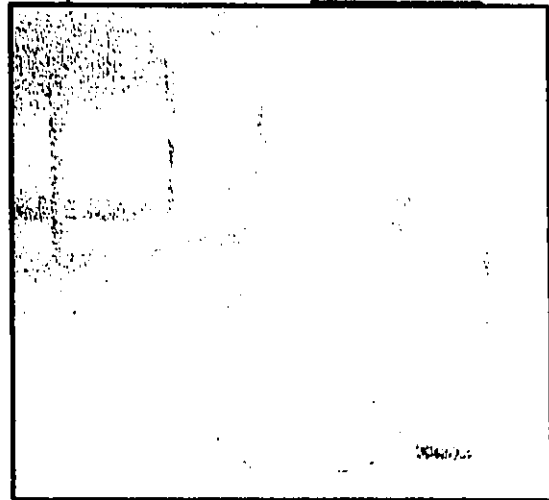


Durer's *Melancholia I* foregrounds the metaphysical angst incited by an unrealizable perfection. The melancholy angel in the engraving laments the notion that she cannot achieve the God-like, creative mastery such as that embodied in the turusphere at her feet. The result of her knowledge is paralysis, sloth even, as evoked by her hunched, seated posture and her air of profound contemplation. The sea-side architectural project that she has begun will simply have to wait; for the angel, ingenious, yet unproductive, is mired in an ocean of thought, nauseated by her own ungodliness.

And yet there is a more extreme degree of melancholia--this is the melancholia represented in Gibb's *Gelancholia I*.

Here, the turusphere is no longer an icon of truth,

perfection and Godliness, rather, it is merely the simulation of these ideals. All that the turusphere represents has been demystified by the time Gelatinous-cube Man enters the scene. The essential hope that sustained the musing angel is unavailable to Gelatinous-cube Man. Not only are the truth and perfection of God unrealizable; they have been proclaimed non-existent. And hence, the melancholy of Gelatinous-cube Man is even more profound than that of Durer's angel, for he is literally suffocating in the viscous pod of his selfhood.



For Gelatinous-cube Man, there is no hope--there is only pure nostalgia. Refusing to embrace his human condition, he strives to resurrect a long-past myth. But gone is the hope for Godly truth; gone is the hope for mythical heroism. Compared to the shoreline motif in Durer's engraving, the underwater setting of *Gelancholia I* shockingly punctuates the fact that the New Melancholic is completely and irretrievably immersed in a post-Renaissance, post-existential nausea. History has come to a grinding halt.



To Out-Dali Dali

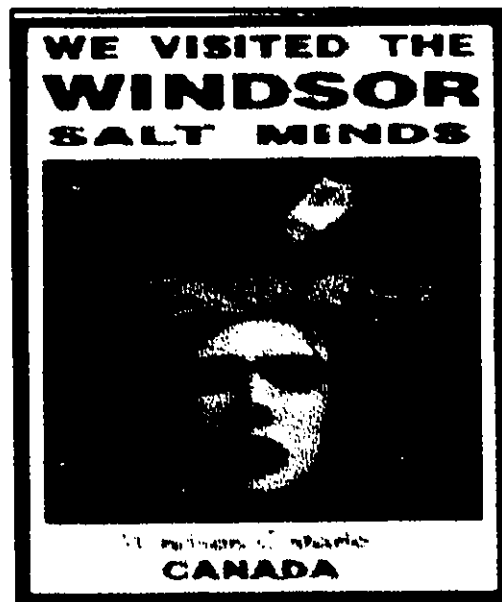
Perhaps the most prevalent commentary regarding Gibb's art is concerning its *Daliesque* nature. What is this seemingly emulous element in the corpus of an artist who claims to be anti-nostalgic? An artist obsessed with the idea of writing a revolutionary manifesto? The answer is simple. Dali's watch is an integral part of Gibb's personal cosmology. For Gibb, the melting watch is a constant reminder that after Duchamp, after Dali, after Dada and the Surrealists, there is no longer any possibility for a true aesthetic. It is as if Dali himself, with the stroke of a brush, melted the clock of art and thereby ended the age of aesthetics. The beautiful and the ugly are now extinct. Simulation, irony and parody are the only possibilities which remain, and the T-shirt is the most powerful medium of artistic expression.



And so, Gibb's desire for an artistic revolution is more an act of self-subversion than anything else. By pretending to erect a manifesto, Gibb is merely highlighting the impossibility of revolution in art (especially in the post-industrial wasteland of Windsor, where the city's art gallery has been moved to a nearby mall in order to make room for a Vegas-style casino). Gibb's work is thus ironic and essentially political. "Imagine art surviving in the city of Windsor?" asks Gibb. Could anything be more ironic? And yet, Gibb's art is surviving. His constant attempts to out-Dada Dada, and to out-Dali Dali have earned him wide recognition as an avant-garde painter, if not a painter of the Avant-Garde. Gibb's *oeuvre*, lauded by the kitsch-loving mass for its often Daliesque nature, and recognized by the arts intelligentsia for its strikingly parodic and ironic thrust, is proof positive that art can survive in Windsor—even if it is an art of irony and simulation—even if it is a kitschy, mass-produced, iron-on art. Perhaps it is possible to season the minds of Windsorites through T-shirt art. Perhaps it is possible to add a little salt to the confoundingly ingenious brain of Dali.



Iron-on Manifesto: A Virtual Tour of the Windsor Salt Minds



- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Iron-on Manifesto: A Virtual Tour of the Windsor Salt Minds



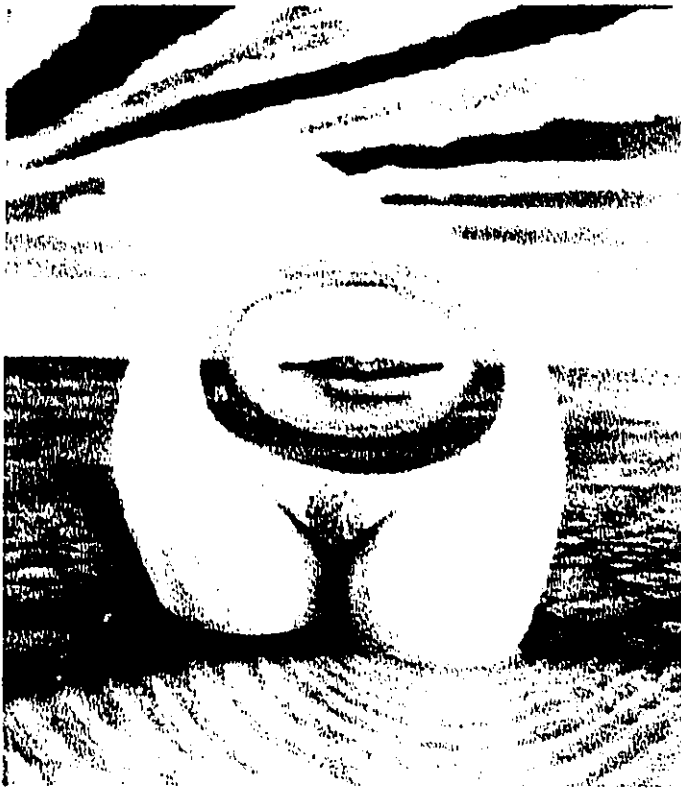
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
.

Iron-on Manifesto: A Virtual Tour of the Windsor Salt Minds



- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Eve Ebbing



Perhaps Gibb's most controversial painting, "Eve Ebbing" is a synthesis of feminist theory and feminist stereotype. This New Eve restores her Edenic innocence by extracting herself from the undaunted flows of the cosmos--the flow of history, the flows of energy, the flows of nature, etc. As a result, she has no heart to pump the blood through her veins, no nipples to divvy out portions of milk. Her pubis is not covered by a fig leaf of shame, rather, it is shielded by a daunting oak leaf which represents her power and authority. Most importantly, it is the prerogative of the new, wombless Eve to halt the flow of life. The maternal matrix is now replaced with a pair of sober, unsensual lips--speaking lips. These are the lips that will liberate Eve--liberate her from her role as human birthing-machine.

This organless being is to violently disrupt the waters of rationality--the waters in which man has forced her to see an antinarcissistic reflection. She stands alone on a deceptively barren land replete with fissures and crevices--evidence of her hidden seismic power--disseminating her philosophy through a hyper-orgasmic discourse. She is a cosmos unto herself--a smooth, slippery, amorphous body of fluid stretching out over the universe.



Fer à repasser



How can we even begin to think about organizing the bricoleur's hodgepodge? How could we possibly iron out all the wrinkles in this mess when messiness is its only destiny, its only goal? The sole purpose of the bricoleur's tinkering is in the tinkering itself, and hence, the bricoleur's labour is the ultimate irony--labour merely for the sake of labour. He is the capitalist's greatest object of scorn. Unless, of course, the bricoleur is a painter and his artistic hodge-podge has a price.

Just as the bricoleur's work is an enigma--production without product--Gibb's *Fer à repasser* is an enigma--a word and not a word, an image, and not an image. This is perhaps the finest example of what Gibb calls a "visual pun". Gibb's visual pun--which may be compared to Foucault's notion of the heterotopia--is the painterly sister of the calligram. It disturbs the order of things--it disrupts our ability to

distinguish between reading and looking. The iron here is clearly a painted picture that we would associate with the word, iron. And yet, we cannot help but associate the picture with the word "irony" as well. Hence, the iron is not an iron, for we cannot help but turn it into irony. The painted signifier cannot be linked peacefully with the signified object, due to the disruptive play of words and images. We cannot help but pass over (*repasse*) the iron and arrive at irony. Clearly, this is a *fer à repasser* ("pressing iron", or "iron to pass over").

Hence, the irony of this painting lies in the inability of the signifier (i.e., the painted iron) to bond with its supposed signified (i.e., the object represented, a 'real' iron). Put simply, the outcome of the signifier is not quite what may have been expected. And yet, should we not expect disorder from this painting? Does the mélange of items at the bottom of the painting not forewarn us of the disorder inherent in the piece? Should we not expect chaos, disorder, irony from the work of a bricoleur?



Java Castrata



Coffee in downtown Windsor has become another part of what Douglas Coupland annoyingly calls the Shampoo Planet lifestyle. The question of "Coffee, tea, or...?" is no longer preceeded by that inviting and mysterious ellipsis. The "or..." has now become "or... espresso?"

"or...turbo Espresso?"

"decaf espresso?" "half-calf?" "cappuccino?"

"decaf cap?" "ice cap?" "mochaccino?" "café au lait?"

"Columbian Roast?"

"Kenyan?" "Irish Cream?" "Orange Brandy?" "Butter Pecan?" "Jamocho Almond Fudge?"

You get the point.

The average coffee shop, with its black sludge, dirty spoons and lipstick-stained, white porcelain cups has been transformed into a postmodern panic scene. The customer enters and stares up at the giant selection board while a wide-eyed cashier stands grinning behind the counter in a vomit-green apron and matching pinstripped hat. This is where the consumer takes the remote control.

What shall it be?

Of course the choices aren't really yours; they have been limited, predetermined by the cafe owner--much in the same way that television networks predetermine what you will be allowed to watch on the tube. Like the panicky t.v. viewer who obsessively wields the remote control, the coffee drinker will eventually lapse into

indifference, and realize that something is missing here.

What ever happened to coffee? Real, authentic coffee?



A True Story About Coffee

When I asked Stephen about "Java Castrata" he told me that while he was painting this piece, he realized from whence this legendary, caffeinated brew originated:

There was once an Arabian shepherd who had undertaken a long trek up a mountainside. When his goats waxed tired and refused to proceed, he searched for something to feed them. He discovered some strange beans growing on a bush and served them to his unsuspecting herd. As the story goes, the brutes raced the shepherd up to the top of the mountain. He arrived at the summit long after the herd, only to find that they were all waiting for him, enjoying their cigarettes and reading copies of Paris Match.

In France, Stephen went on to assure me, coffee enjoys its own special aura:

In the morning, **espresso**, or, *café express*, is sipped slowly by businessmen standing at the counters of their favourite bars. Saucer in the palm of one hand, and a tiny cup--held with both poise and machismo--in the other, they enjoy friendly conversation with their backs to the boisterous streets. This simple masculine ritual is an essential part of life in the French metropolis.

Café crème--which is better known by its Italian sister's name, Cappuccino--is a kinder, gentler coffee. This is the mid-morning hot drink, or the evening hot drink of preference. Topped with frothy milk, a comforting cup of café crème is subtly reminiscent of the maternal matrix. This is a soothing, leisurely drink, large enough to last through a mid-morning break, mild enough to be sipped in the late hours of the evening.

Finally, **café au lait**, a strictly French phenomenon, is coffee immersed in the warm, milky, maternal matrix. Served in a large bowl, *café au lait* may be easily manipulated by the child who is still uneasy with the handle of a coffee cup. *Café au lait* is the baptismal water of the French coffee-drinking culture. It nurtures the seed of caffeination in young French hearts and prepares them for darker, murkier waters. Note that his drink's vessel must be held with both hands, and raised to the mouth like a sacred chalice.



.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.



- •
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•

In *Java Castrata*, if Stephen's coffee mug is crushing the Dalian-moustachioed clock--symbol of memory, time, nostalgia--it is only because coffee shops in Gibb's hometown have no respect for the sacred aura of coffee -- no respect for the history of coffee. And if the watch's crushed bells resemble metal breasts, this is because the coffee consumers in downtown Windsor have no reverence for the maternal authority invested in coffee. The motherly bosom suggested by the bells in this painting has been industrialized, metallized even, at the hands of most ungrateful children. Notably, the breasts bells here are of a flesh/metal alloy that renders the Coffee Mother doubly impotent: as breasts of metal, they are incapable of producing milk for the coffee children; and as fleshy bells, they are unable to produce a sound that would awaken the children from their spell of ingratitude. This is an awakening that no amount of Windsor coffee could provoke, for as the Windsor coffee children are concerned, non-dairy *coffee whitener* is a satisfying surrogate--and it even comes in a wide variety of flavours. These coffee bastards, children of dissolving origins, are quite evidently not averse to simulation.



-

Ice Box



Possibly Gibb's most lude painting, *Ice Box* is an image of the Windsor stripper. Renown all over North America for its strip clubs, Windsor may be translated into a most appropriate anagram: "**Sin Word**". And what better location for a strip club than the most (post)industrial city of Canada? Gibb's painting demonstrates that the stripper who struts along the runway in a Windsor bar is the ultimate in industrialised, commodified sex. She is an easy-to-assemble woman for an assembly-line culture. A woman on ice representing sex on call. But unlike the call girl, the stripper is never fully devoured by the consumer. The consumer, in this sense, is like Marx's proletariat, alienated from the product of his labour, the product that disappears somewhere behind the curtain at the end of the assembly line/runway.

The unattainability of the stripper is underscored by the tormented male faces that replace her breasts and genitalia. It is in the enraged faces that Gibb has captured the reversible nature of the strip club scene; for the stripper here is not at the mercy of the clients--rather, it is the frustrated clients who are enslaved by the seduction machine that they have created. They are the pawns in a cruel, seductive game of chess. An endless game of appearance and illusion in which the stripper holds all the cards. The stripper represents the eternal feminine in all her power. She is intangible, insatiable and for all her play of pure superficiality, she is a limitless figure -- degree zero of the sexes.

The seismic power of the feminine is brought home in this painting through the stripper's exploding head. If she appears monstrous, this is only because she reveals the shocking reality that lies beneath the veil of the stripper's game. She is a beautiful, volcanic force, shamelessly unleashing her power on an unwary adversary--unwary because he, like the voyeur in *Ice Box*, can only see woman through a window fogged by his own breath.



Bronche l'oeil or Eye Socket

The ultimate expression of superfluity, "plug the plug in the plug," could be used to express the resounding ambivalence which lies behind Gibb's "*Bronche l'oeil*." Is it the appliance that activates the electricity in the electrical outlet? Or is it the outlet that brings the appliance to life? Is it the eye that lends the power of seduction to the object of admiration? Or is it the object of admiration which electrocutes the eye through its seductive power? In which direction does the flow of energy travel?

We know that energy is extracted from nature through the use of technology. But what happens when we willingly subject our own bodies to technological influences? What happens when we begin to view our own body as a site of potentialization? As a stockpile of manipulable codes? What happens in this case is that we may no longer speak of bodies and of seduction, but of machines and of conduction--of the interminable flow of energy through all matter on earth.



Here, the eye is a conducting machine, a conductor's eye, we might say, sustaining a constant energetic flux. Like the pun (i.e., the title of this very piece) or even like the *trompe l'oeil* itself, the essence of the conductive eye is sheer irony--it is neither here nor there, neither seductive nor seduced. It is merely another location in the flow of all energy--an indifferent, looping offramp, slippery and weather-beaten, on the superhighway of conduction.



Sissy-phas, or, Sis *en abyme*



Upon hearing Zarathustra's description of the "Last Man," the man who lives in complete physical and material security, the crowd pleaded with their leader: "Give us this last man, O Zarathustra." "Turn us into these last men." At last, their pleading has been answered, for the ideals of human equality, security from war and a free market have been accomplished in a large part of the world. And yet, we must ask, is this all there is to happiness? With the brass ring of liberal democracy in our hands, have we finally achieved the ultimate in existential satisfaction? The answer given by Gibb's *Sissy-phas, or Sis en abyme* is a resounding "no".

Having achieved the comforts of a wealthy, democratic existence, the Last Man, or Sissy-phas, still feels the need for competition, sacrifice and pain. So he

diverts his energy into a myriad forms of self-imposed struggle. He is a tiny clone of Sisyphus, or a Sisyphus *en abyme* playing out an eternal game of fruitless toil, simulated warfare and senseless masochism. Could it be that all human beings simply possess a natural propensity for struggle? This theory has been posited by many philosophers as far back as Rousseau, Machiavelli, Hobbes and even Plato, who used the word "thymos" to describe a universal human characteristic which compels a person to struggle for superior recognition.

By instilling a brain-like quality to the rock of Sissy-phas, Gibb continues this philosophical tradition -- he posits that the human propensity for suffering is a cerebral phenomenon. Perhaps there exists a naturally-occurring masochistic neuron, cell, or gland (could the thymus gland be responsible?) within the human brain, driving us all hopelessly towards struggle and competition. If this were the case, the achievement of self-satisfaction would be virtually impossible, an uphill battle against our own genetic composition.

And yet, there may still be hope for an end to all this struggling. Gene-mapping could possibly allow us to isolate the source of this masochistic behaviour and extract it from the brain. Through this process of re-cognition, we could create, and subsequently clone, the totally uncompetitive, or unthymotic being -- a being perfectly content with its existence.



No Parole & The Wrench



Drawn from Gibb's high industrial period, *No Parole* documents the sense of helplessness, frustration and rage that Gibb witnessed during his years working on various Windsor assembly lines. As opposed to the machine/flesh cyborgs of Gibb's later works, *No Parole*-man is still equipped with a fully human identity. However, this identity has been violently compromised, enslaved even, by the machine of industry. This is not a case then, of machine/flesh synthesis, but of machine imposed upon the flesh like an iron mask--a torture helmet, signalling the vice--or vise-- of industry.

Gibb's factory experience taught him that working on the assembly-line can have radical transformative effects on one's mind. Most jobs require the worker to stand for hours, monotonously repeating the same operations over and over. Usually, these operations require just enough attention to keep the worker's mind

from straying towards deep thought, and his eyes from straying towards the pages of a book (although there may be time to browse quickly through a newspaper). If a certain job allows the opportunity for extensive pondering, then the over-looker will see to it that more operations are added to the worker's task list. After a while, not only the labourer's body, but the labourer's mind becomes enslaved by the machine.

Here, the machine is not a friendly appendage, rather, it is a prison cell that fuses itself around the mind of the labourer, constraining his thoughts and his senses. His destiny and sole obligation is to become like a machine. Daily, the worker's eyes are hooked up to the machine. His ears are assaulted by its deafening whirr -- unless, of course he wears ear plugs, thereby suppressing the sense of hearing altogether. Petrol and carbon dioxide flow constantly through his nostrils and out of his mouth. He smells like a machine when he goes home. He hears machines in bed at night, and feels the instruments of his labour vibrating in his hands. When he closes his eyes, the assembly-line panic scene appears before him, summoning him to the task. Even in his dreams, he answers to the machine. There is no escape -- he is a prisoner with no chance for parole.

And yet, the title of this painting will not allow the viewer to rest easy. For just as "no parole" signifies the impossibility of release or relief from incarceration, it may also mean 'no voice', 'no means of self-expression' (if we consider the translation of the French word *parole*). And so, we might assume that the worker here warrants our pity--he is a victim who has no voice because he has been enslaved. Or, on the contrary, we might suggest that this painting is a contemptuous commentary on the workers' lack of ambition--i.e., the worker has a voice, and yet he willingly relegates his power of self-expression, allowing himself to be victimized by the machine. Whatever the case, *No Parole* captures the essence of the industrial age as seen by Gibb--the labourer, in both body and mind, is a slave of the machine. His identity as a human being is fully compromised, or rather, stifled by a machinistic torture chamber which grafts itself onto his body and bores its way into his brain.

But as Gibb was well aware, the industrial age, the era of man-enslaved-by-machine was soon to be replaced by another age, the era of man/machine synthesis, or cyborgism, only later known as the digital age. Gibb's *The Wrench* captures the essence of this man/machine state. Whereas the subject's teeth in

No Parole are clenched out of necessity--his mouth is clamped shut by the vise of industry--the teeth in *The Wrench* are clenched out of the subject's own will. The subject, here, is quite evidently attempting to resist the vibrating of the machine. His tightly clenched jaws are juxtaposed to the jaws of the wrench clenched around the head of a bolt which seems to be holding the subject in place. This is a scene of violent conflict. Note that Gibb gives us very few clues as to the ultimate outcome of this contest of competing forces, for this painting is merely a forecast--the portentous image of a turning point--a cultural wrench.



What Gibb has captured here, is the terminal phase of modern technology: man--being the last natural resource on the earthly desert--confronting machine in order to produce energy. And yet, the seeming energy, or even acceleration, underscored here by the vibrating face, is undermined by the crystallized water droplets which suggest immobility, stasis. In *The Wrench*, the human/machine synthesis, or cyborgianism which lies at the heart of terminal culture is not located on a scene of acceleration. On the contrary, what we have here is an apocalyptic setting of equilibrium, paralysis. Witness the impossible synthesis of human/machine, acceleration/inertia, the result of which can only be the fragmentation and ultimate dissolution of the human entity into the arid atmosphere of the post-industrial landscape.

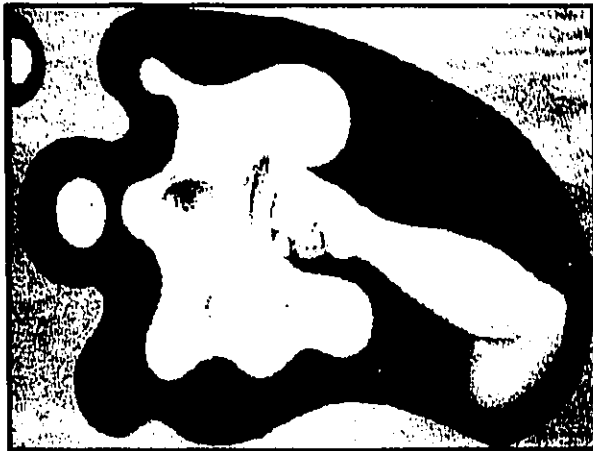


Slow-motion Universe

Can one imagine a slow refraction of faces and gestures, like the movements of swimmers in heavy water? How do you look someone in the eyes, how do you seduce him if you are not sure he is still there? What if a cinematic slow-motion took control of the whole universe? A comical exaltation of the accelerated, which transcends sense by explosion--but also the poetic enchantment of slow-motion, which destroys sense by implosion.



Suspense and slow-motion are our current tragic forms, since acceleration has become our banal condition. Time is no longer evident in its normal passing, since it has been distended, enlarged to the floating dimension of reality. It is no longer illuminated by will. Nor is space illuminated any longer by movement. Since their destination has been lost, some kind of predestination would have to intervene again to give them back a tragic effect. We can read this predestination in suspense and slow-motion, that which so suspends the development of the form that the meaning no longer crystallizes.



Or else
beneath the discourse of meaning another flows slowly and implodes under it.

(Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*)



Windsor Man



Windsor Man is a gripping rendition of one man's attempt to ward off the byproducts of the postindustrial wasteland that is Windsor. Standing Charon-like in his modest vessel, Windsor Man holds aloft his paddle in the desperate hope of dispelling the wrath of the postmodern monster. Gambling, commodified sex, industrial afterbirth and unwarranted conspicuous consumption are all festering in the body of the putrid beast that Windsor Man must face.

And yet, perhaps this is a faulty interpretation of *Windsor Man*. Is he really holding the paddle as a weapon? Perhaps the paddle here is more akin to a magic wand--the wand usurped by the Sorcerer's apprentice. Windsor Man has conjured up a post-industrial hurricane. But unlike the archetypal

apprentice, Windsor Man revels in the storm. He has succeeded in giving a form to all that plagues him. Standing with his wand aloft, he holds this crystallized tornado at bay, waiting for the sorcerer to return and relieve his tired arms.



Fuzzy Dice

The image of the artist isolated in his lofty garrison with his muse is long past. Today, high art is mass art. An artist must be able to read the poker face of the populus, and lay down his cards. This is the age of virtual art museums available on-line for hungry art-consumers who tap the wires of the electronic globe. Courtly patrons are extinct, the intelligentsia is no more, and kitsch carries the day. So why not move all the trappings of a Vegas-style Casino into an art gallery? Why not clothe the school-house bricks of the art-gallery in fashionable white stucco? Why not put a monstrous neon

Casino sign on the facade of the Art Gallery of Windsor, and let it wink playfully at hungry consumers across the border? For the casino knows what's really happening here--the friendly, Spanish-style giant is in on the game:

the Art Gallery of Windsor houses one of the greatest art exhibits in the history of Western culture.

What an exhibit! Sleek black whales--assembled only kilometres away--glide smoothly between the arches of the spectacular sand castle. The doors open and you're swimming in brilliant neon, gulping mouthfuls of billowy smoke. And the rustling--the happy rustling of coins in slots, coins clinking in metal boxes, rolls of coins rapping against hard steel edges and exploding into hollow, plastic cups. A wave of bodies carries you to a shimmering treasure chest. You grasp the salty handle with your wet palm and pull in breathless ecstasy. Two cherries and a lemon. You're bigger than Dada, more famous than Warhol. For this is not a melancholic, underwater realm. This is orgy, utopia, New Atlantis, New Atlantic City. And we're all artists.



.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

The Screan

A simple glance at Gibb's *The Screan* tells us that this is a transformation of Edward Munch's angst-ridden work. So in order to understand what Gibb is getting at here, we must harken back to the modernist aesthetic with its thematics of social alienation and solitude. Whereas *The Scream* may be considered an icon of the modernist *age of anxiety*, *The Screan* is an emblem of the digital age, the age of simulated disalienation through electronic global unification.

Here, the painful physical alienation of Munch's homunculus has been replaced by a cyborgian metamorphosis. All the promises of global unification are demystified in this painting--a piece that underscores the subject's violent fragmentation, decapitation even, at the hands of digital technology.

In a noisy satellite socius, unification may only be achieved through the interaction of talking (or screaming) heads. Here, every scream is heard because every voice, every face, may be digitally encoded and transmitted across the globe. Yet this universal digitization which promises a cathartic release from solitude, leads not only to a crisis of social fragmentation, but to a critical state of self-fragmentation. Rather than fulfilling the subject's need for community, the screen can only offer a simulated connectedness. The unheard scream of Munch's alienated homunculus is here replaced by the globally-disseminated, yet simulated scream of the surreal Screen-head Man. The subject who can only interact with others through his simulation on a video terminal is no more than a body without a head--or a head without a body. We are now beyond the realm of McLuhanesque extensionism. This is terminal culture in its extreme.

And yet, Gibb's parody of Munch's anxiety-ridden *Scream* goes even further. The plane on the horizon of *The Screan* is a visual pun referring to the terminal culture--the crash culture--that is here represented. This is a *fin-de-millennium* culture where the prevalent anxiety results not from a sense of alienation, but from the sensation that everything seems to be accelerating violently towards an ultimate crisis point through a series of catastrophes: the end of communism, the end of art, the end of religion, etc. Notably, the *fin de millennium* anxiety is only compounded by the forecasting of fantastic, technological developments such as artificial intelligence--i.e., the end of the human being.

Gibb's *Screan* mocks millenarian hysteria by crystallizing it in a catastrophic scene where the airplane threatens to crash before reaching its terminal, and the last man finally loses his head in what appears to be a cheap, laughable, vaudeville trick. Could it be that we are not in a high-speed, terminal phase after all? Could it be that, in all this maniacal acceleration, we have reached a point of stasis? Could it be that we are destined forever to live in a world of crystallized catastrophe, recycling the tricks of days gone by? Gibb's *Screan* answers "yes" to all of these questions.



Undeterminable

One says that one is speaking, but by speaking one is only verifying the network and the fact that one is linked up with it. There is not even an 'other' at the other end, for in a simple reciprocation of symbols of recognition there is no longer an identifiable transmitter or receiver, but simply two terminals. The one terminal's signal to the other is merely an indication that something is going through and that, therefore, nothing is happening. Perfect dissuasion.



(Baudrillard, *Seduction*)



- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Mine

What is this labyrinthine abyss gaping beneath the precarious Windsor metropolis? What is this cancerous, salty network, meandering its excrescential way through the infrastructure of the city? From whence emanates the seismic rumbling that shakes the foundations of buildings all across Windsor and Essex County? Who is to blame for these fissures? Whose fault is it?

Mine--Gibb's bleakest painting--is a melancholy tribute to the alienation and isolation that plagues postmodern man--a plague to which artists--especially modern artists--have always paid particular attention. But now, melancholy seems to be the essential--and most banal--element of the human condition. Buried in a landslide of information, tucked away in tiny cells located along the global vascular system, labouring endlessly to rob the earth of her final resources, the postmodern being is like the Windsor Salt miner, toiling away in his caverns. The only light that shines on postmodern man comes from the rectangular, iridescent hole through which he peers into a world incredibly more spectacular than his own.



And yet, why should we accept this melancholy interpretation? Why, when this image and its cryptic title arouse infinite associations, infinite connotations, infinite possibilities? Must we assume that the title of the painting, *Mine*, locates the subject within a subterranean universe?

"This is a mine."(?)

Could it not be that this piece represents Gibb's own metaphysical desolation as an archetypal artist?

"This alienation is mine."(?)

Or again, could the title simply be an indication of Gibb's ownership of his work, his authority, his copyright over this dismal piece?

"This painting is mine."(?)

We find ourselves before a Magritte-like manifestation raised to the nth power by means of a clever pun.

And yet again, why should we accept this indeterminacy? Why not assign a single meaning to this painting? Why not assume that this is a prophetic manifesto, and not a nostalgic lament? This painting is a harbinger; this light, the symbol of a covenant; this, the promise of a Promethian gift. The subject here has begun to burrow a hole in the wall of his cavern. He has found a passage to freedom and for the first time, he peers carefully into the new world, illuminating it with his own light. Here, the miner is a herald, a seer, a magi bearing nothing other than the gift of salt.

